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ABSTRACT

A communication and aging course could potentially enhance both gerontological care providers' understanding of older persons' communication needs, and the older students' communication proficiency. Regardless of the theory of social adaption to aging that the course embraces--disengagement, activity-personality, social exchange, or fundamental interpersonal relations orientation--it should promote life satisfaction by encouraging interpersonal activity and developing communication skills. The main tenets of such a communication and aging course would be that (1) effective communication is essential to the life satisfaction of all humans but may be more vital to the coping ability of the elderly than for any other age group; and (2) intergenerational interaction holds rich potential for everyone involved. The course would work toward a clear understanding of elderly individuals' self concept and its significance to their effective interpersonal communication. In addition, the course would develop those problem solving skills that enable the older student not only to bring past experiences to bear on society's problems, but also to cope with personal communication problems and challenges that are inevitable consequences of new settings, roles, expectations and needs. A plan for an actual course embodying these principles is described and its specific content detailed. The course is designed to meet once a week for 150 minutes, over 15 weeks, for 3 hours of college credit. (JD)

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COMMUNICATION AND GERONTOLOGY:

A Proposed Solution to Shared Problems

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INTRODUCTION

Can concern for the aged be youthful? In our discipline it can. We find this chronological paradox in the burgeoning interest of communication educators in the need for and provision of communication skill training to our elderly population. This shifting of or division of focus to serving the needs of an aging clientele appears to be little more than a decade old. In what often is cited as the seminal article on communication and aging, Hawkins (1975, p.2) noted "a real need to develop educational programs that involve the aged," and urged speech professionals to institute communication classes for older students as well as for gerontological care provider trainees.

Carmichael (1976) soon echoed Hawkins' pioneering call with the suggestion that communication and gerontology ought to be considered interfacing disciplines whose cross-fertilization should produce mutually beneficial research. Citing the many problems of aging which "are directly related to communication" (p. 121) and the fact that little was then known about the "interpersonal needs, habits or problems of the aged population" (p. 123), Carmichael urged communication scholars to actively research gerontological issues relevant to their own field.

In the decade since these germinal efforts, a growing body of research and professional activity in the speech communication field has focused on this concern with communication education for the aging. The Speech Communication Association, the discipline's national professional organization, has formed a Commission on Communication and Aging to "promote education, research, service and consulting in communication and aging" (Bylaws) and the commission sponsored a short course and three academic programs on gerontological communication issues at the 1985 national SCA convention. Research reports and pedagogical essays are appearing with increasing frequency in national, regional and state

scholarly journals. As Webb (1984, pp. 1-2) noted, "Communication and aging specialists are producing a growing body of research which makes a significant contribution to both the fields of gerontology and speech communication." Furthermore, business meetings of the SCA Commission on Communication and Aging at the 1985 convention produced considerable evidence that a growing number of college and university speech communication programs are moving to include gerontological communication courses in their curricula.

Demographic projections suggest this rather recent focussing on the communication needs of the elderly is timely and, in fact, probably overdue. In 1984 there were 28 million Americans aged 65 and older, nearly one-eighth of our total population (Profile, 1986). By the year 2030, a total of 65 million Americans aged 65 and over is projected (ibid), a figure which will constitute more than 21 percent of the nation's population. Schuetz (1982) further noted that 60 per cent of the over-65 group are women who "are likely to be less educated, have less work experience, and lack coping skills for managing an independent lifestyle" (p. 340). The National Center for Education Statistics reports (Frankel and Gerald, 1982) that by 1990, older students will account for 47 per cent of the expected 12.1 million total college student population.

It may well be, however, that this marriage of gerontology and communication academic disciplines is, in fact a one-sided union viewed by our gerontology partners as beset with incompatibility. A review of journals and convention programs of both the Speech Communication Association and of gerontology related societies such as American Society on Aging, Association for Gerontology in Higher Education, Gerontological Society of America and American Association of Retired Persons suggests we are not yet quite together at the altar. It appears that while gerontologists are aware that a sense of well being and life satisfaction should be and usually is a broad goal of the aging

and of their care providers, and although there is a rather general realization that communication skills facilitate accomplishment of that goal, there seems very little awareness that the speech education discipline stands able and eager to provide the training and guidance needed by our older learners.

The purpose of this article is to suggest that communicologists and gerontologists ought to better understand each other's disciplines so as to cooperate more effectively in facilitating the successful adaptation of older Americans to the aging process. We who work with oral communication skills should acquaint ourselves with or refresh our memories as to the basic theories of social gerontology and we should strive to familiarize our gerontological colleagues with basic communication theories. Once this article has capsulized selected representative theories of the two disciplines and thus has highlighted their theoretic commonalities, the potential of communication and aging courses for providing those skills which both disciplines agree are essential for successful aging will be discussed and the specific content of such a course will be detailed.

THEORETICAL BASES

Social gerontology as a field of academic inquiry is even younger than speech communication. Forty-five years after the founding of what now is known as the Speech Communication Association, Simmons (1960) pioneered social gerontology by reviewing data from various primitive societies and concluding that as society modernization or standard of living is enhanced, the status of the aged has declined. Social gerontology's theoretical models which are briefly summarized in the following paragraphs could be considered to have evolved both to explain this negative correlation between a society's status and the status of its aged and to suggest possible corrective measures.

The Disengagement Theory (Cumming, Dean, Newell and McCaffrey, 1960; and Cumming and Henry, 1961) posited a mutual withdrawal of the aging individual from society and of society from the individual. It suggested that this mutual alienation tends to be inevitable and universal and, possibly, mutually beneficial, as the aging turn inward, shed responsibilities, and become increasingly preoccupied with self and preparation for death. Society, meanwhile is, with a relatively clear conscience, delegating responsibility for care of the aging over to certified care providers, trained to ease their client's withdrawal and death preparation. Although some experts have argued that successful adaptation to aging depends upon an acceptance of this withdrawing process (Tallmer and Kutner, 1969; Maddox and Eisdorfer, 1962), others such as Tobin and Neugarten (1961, p. 346) have insisted that "with advancing age, engagement rather than disengagement is more closely related to psychological well being." Engagement and the psychological well being it can produce is a basic goal of courses in communication and aging.

A second widely accepted theoretical model is known as the Activity Theory (Havighurst and Albrecht, 1953; Lego, 1953; Burgess, 1954; and Gubrium, 1973). This is generally considered the first prescriptive or problem solving approach to social gerontology. It attributes aging's loss of morale and self-concept to role loss and cessation of middle-age oriented activities, but predicts a positive relationship between involvement in new roles and activities and renewed life satisfaction (Bley, Goodman, Dye and Harel, 1972). While research validation of the activity theory may still be inconclusive or even contradictory (FallCreek, 1984),there appears to be adequate evidence that for some personalities (Havighurst, Neugarten and Tobin, 1961) and in many settings, elderly interaction (activity) and life satisfaction can be positively correlated (Nussbaum, 1981; Larson, 1978). In fact, Knapp (1976) discovered

that the number of hours per week spent on social activity of an informal nature was a major predictor of life satisfaction. Troll (1980) concluded that communicative activity serves critical helping functions in building life satisfaction. A goal of communication and aging courses is to enhance the older person's communicative activity skills.

A third theoretical approach toward successful aging is the Personality-Continuity Theory proposed by Neugarten, Havighurst and Tobin (1968). This theory postulates that the key variable, the pivotal dimension in predicting relationships between social activity and positive life satisfaction, is the personality of the individual. That is, successful aging is dependent upon each individual personality. However, many scholars consider this simply a theoretical variable which modifies or is an adjunct to the Activity Theory.

FallCreek (1984), an advocate of the fourth theoretical approach to analysis and understanding of the aging process, has suggested that it has long been used in sociology and economics but only recently has been applied to gerontology and communicology (Martin, 1971). This Social Exchange Theory (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959, 1978; and Homans, 1961, 1974) can serve both descriptive and prescriptive needs of the gerontologist. It argues that satisfactory life interaction depends upon possession of or access to resources needed to implement social exchanges and interpersonal relations. When older persons are deprived of valued resources needed for favorable social exchanges, there is likely to be no congruence between that individual's desire for interaction and his/her ability to implement that desire.

Thibaut and Kelley (1959) have written that an interaction takes place only when the behavior of one person has been rewarded or punished by the other person. That is, interaction patterns depend on the perceived rewards and costs involved. And, as Homans (1974, p. 12) expressed it, ". . . the more often a

particular action of a person is rewarded, the more likely a person is to perform that action."

Social exchange theorists explain that a key to perceiving an interpersonal relationship as promising more rewards than costs is interpersonal power. Dowd (1980, p. 34) defined this type of power as "the state of relative independence which results from having a greater share of valued resources than one's exchange partner."

Dowd (1980, p. 6) further defined interpersonal power as "the ability to get what one wants and to influence others in ways which further one's own interests." Thus, the critical medium of interpersonal power is resources --

> personal characteristics, such as strength, beauty, charm, integrity, intelligence . . .; material possessions, such as money, property . . .; relational characteristics, such as influential friends, relatives or caring children . . .; authority, such as . . . political office, position in a formal organization or status within a group . . .; and generalized reinforcers, such as respect, approval, recognition, support, and other rewards (Dowd, 1980, p.38).

As the aging experience what must seem a systematic, inevitable and cumulative loss of these resources, they often trade upon "the residue of old relationships and obligations and grandparenthood" (Martin, 1971, p. 110), only to find that these sources of power also soon lose value. As costs seem to outweigh rewards of interaction, withdrawal progressively occurs and we observe the phenomenon commonly referred to as disengagement. However, those older persons who possess other resources, other sources of power, such as communicative and assertiveness skills, can sufficiently compensate for other losses to tip the balance toward rewarding rather than costly interactions and thus toward continuing engagement rather than disengagement. FallCreek (1984, p. 61) summarized that "The more resources the individual brings to the social exchange market place, the more likely it is that he/she will be able to determine the nature of the social exchange" by employing that interpersonal

power to reduce or eliminate the discrepancy between desired and experienced "goodness of outcome" of interactions.

A final theoretical perspective normally is linked with psychology and/or communication but certainly is relevant to the study of gerontological communication. Attributed to William Schutz (1958, 1966), the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation Theory, or FIRO, posits that all humans, regardless of age, share three basic social needs and that interpersonal communication is our attempt to fulfill those three needs by relating to other humans. Schutz sees social needs as analogous to biological needs in the sense that failure or inability to satisfy those needs risks illness or even death. He proposed (Schutz, 1958, p. 13) that the basic social needs, which he identifies as inclusion, control and affection, "constitute a sufficient set of areas of interpersonal behavior for the prediction and explanation of interpersonal phenomena."

By inclusion, Schutz meant "interacting with people, . . . acknowledgement, recognition . . . participation" (1958, p. 22). As to control, Schutz believed its flavor is transmitted "by behavior involving influence, leadership, power, coercion, authority, accomplishment . . ." (1958, p. 23). Finally, Schutz suggested that affection's flavor is embodied in situations of "love, emotional closeness, personal confidences, intimacy . . ." (1958, p. 24). In sum, Schutz argued that the goal of the interpersonal communicator should be to so effectively interact with others that a sufficient balance is struck between the three needs that he/she can feel comfortable and satisfied in terms of inclusion, control and affection.

As social gerontologists have studied and refined these models of adaptation to aging, one construct seems to be emerging as the accepted criterion measure of personally satisfying aging. This construct, life

satisfaction, may first have been discussed by Neugarten, Havighurst and Tobin (1961) but was later defined by Adams (1969) as having four discernible dimensions: a happy optimistic mood tone; a zest for life, as opposed to apathy; congruence between desired and achieved goals; and resolution and fortitude. George (1986) summarized what we now know about the most powerful predictors of life satisfaction:

> For all adults, regardless of age, the major determinants of life satisfaction are attachments to the social structure (generally measured in terms of social characteristics such as education and marital status), occupational achievements and economic resources, physical health, involvement in and support from primary groups, and participation in meaningful social and leisure activities. . . . and openness to new experience, or cognitive flexibility (1986, pp. 6-7).

As we review these models of aging and communication, including Disengagement, Activity-Personality, Social Exchange and F.I.R.O., and if we accept as our ultimate goal a state of life satisfaction, we now should be ready to establish a minimal set of criteria for any Communication and Aging course. That is, it should stress interpersonal activity to a degree which would induce engagement rather than disengagement; it should develop interpersonal skills which enable the older person to bring resources to the market place of social interaction which produce greater rewards than costs; and it should enable the older student to achieve inclusion, control and affection to the degree and in sufficient balance that life satisfaction is not only an achievable but a predictable condition of aging.

Description of Course Rationale

The course to be described herein was designed to meet specific needs of a diverse student group but its structure and components would adapt to most gerontology and aging course settings. It is designed as the single communication-focused course offered as an elective in a certification program

for gerontological care providers as well as for speech communication majors. Its design might be characterized as hybrid, both in terms of intended clientele and in content. It is intended to meet the needs of, and thus appeal to, both the older degree or non degree seeking life long learner and the younger traditional student working toward certification as a gerontological care and/or service provider, and the student majoring in speech communication. In terms of specifics, the objectives are to enhance student skills in intrapersonal, interpersonal and small group settings, with special emphasis on self concept enhancement, assertiveness, problem solving and conflict resolution.

As the course has evolved, we have succeeded in basing it on two important tenets. First, effective communication is essential to the life satisfaction of all humans but it may be more vital to the coping ability of the elderly than for any other age group. While Atchley (1972) concluded that "The elderly are more insecure, more dependent, more passive and less power oriented than persons in other segments of the population" (p. 77), Marcus (1978) stressed, on the other hand, that ". . . they surpass young learners in verbal and integrating ability" (p. 127). Similarly, Schuetz (1982) observed that elders socialize less and also less effectively than others, yet they have greater need and more potential benefit from socializing and Aldridge (1976) added that socialization helps develop but also is helped by development of coping behavior skills, self-expression, interpersonal relationships and leadership opportunities. Ross and Litterst (1981) detailed the types of crises faced by the elderly, such as coping with retirement, financial stress, disabling illness, loss of spouse, and enforced institutionalization, to stress how critical to life satisfaction or even survival may be the development of communication skills.

The second basic tenet upon which a communication and aging course should be built is that intergenerational interaction holds rich potential for everyone

involved, if for no other reason than to correct the misperceptions which have developed between generations. For instance, Kogan and Shelton (1962) discovered that young persons thought older citizens needed assistance more than anything else, while the elderly respondents themselves identified their greatest need as a positive response from others. The young supposed the elderly most feared death, while the elderly in fact reported that they most feared poverty and dependence. The young also supposed the old most resented the young and youthfulness, while older respondents said what they really most resented was rejection and reference to age as being totally negative and frightening.

One of the initial themes for the 1981 White House Conference on Aging was "Working toward an age integrated society" (FallCreek, 1984, pp. 2-3). Powell and Arquitt (1978) include in their discussion of age-integrated programming benefits "increasing positive attitudes of old people toward young and vice versa" and "providing younger persons with more accurate information about the aged and the aging process" (p. 27), as well as providing access for people of different ages to have meaningful interaction and providing opportunities for older persons to continue cultural and societal contributions.

COURSE CONTENT

The first specific objective of this course would be to work toward a clear understanding of the self concept and its significance to effective communication and then toward developing in each student an accurate, up-to-date, positive self-image. Many college students in the young adult age group and possibly an even larger proportion of older learners tend to self-deprecation, emphasizing their own perceived shortcomings, minimizing their strengths, and exerting great energy attempting to preserve an obviously out-dated self-concept. Even among those who have led relatively self-assured pre-retirement lives, this emphasis on the negative is not surprising. They are

apt to find themselves suddenly in a dependent status, often completely reversing child-parent roles in the family, with loss of at least some economic, physical, and social control over their lives. They frequently feel they still have knowledge, skills, intelligence, and abilities for which they can find no use. They also become aware of physical and bodily image changes. Many believe that aging means inevitable loss of attractiveness, especially when they seem to be losing so much -- hair, teeth, hearing, health, friends, loved ones, mobility, visual acuity, smoothness of skin, even control of one's destiny. At any rate, research does suggest that older adults apply different criteria than do young adults in judging interpersonal attraction (Webb, 1981).

There also is a tendency among young adults to overcompensate for the suppose reduced communicative capacity of the elderly -- talking slower, louder, with more careful articulation and with emphasis on simple social, superficial communication topics. This is one of the factors which leads to the even greater difficulty institutionalized elders have in maintaining a positive self-concept. What is not intended to be but seems to be derogatory or critical communication can be degrading to the older person, especially if uttered in their presence, repeatedly, and in a manner as if they can not hear or understand. It also may be fair to observe that the daily routine of many institutions is planned generally for the convenience of the institution, eliminating most freedom of choice, and that communication and personal needs have not always been a funding priority of grant-awarding agencies.

While a negative or out-dated self-concept will tend to reduce communicative effectiveness, training such as included in the course herein described <u>can</u> help offset or compensate for negative perceptions with activities designed to:

a. Teach understanding and acceptance of the aging process

b. Teach understanding of the nature of the self-concept and the factors which are believed to stabilize it at a positive level.

(I) Kalish (1975) has suggested that self concept will tend to stabilize when one has

(A) a reasonably stable recent history

(B) an anticipated reasonable standard of living

(C) no strong fears of being left alone

c. Provide opportunities for socialization, acceptance and interaction in small groups

d. Encourage staying active, at least mentally

e. Encourage expression of opinions, beliefs, values

f. Stress the value of past experience to society's problem solving challenges of today.

A second specific objective of the course should be to develop and/or enhance those problem-solving skills which will enable the older learner not only to bring his past experience to bear on society's problems, but to cope with personal communication problems and challenges which are inevitable consequences of new settings, new roles, new expectations and needs. Especially relevant to the enrollment mix we seek in this course is Webb's (1981) observation that many elderly do, in fact, live in a social world very similar to that of college students. Friends, neighbors, even roommates come and go, move in and out. However, as she notes, the elderly have much less mobility and fewer alternatives available to them, and research has shown the secret to social survival among the elderly is replacing friends and associates before isolation habits set in.

The course was scheduled to meet once a week for 150 minutes for a total of 15 weeks and was to have enabled the student to earn three credit hours of

either undergraduate or graduate credit, since our institution permits double numbering of courses. It was decided that we would proceed without a required text but would rely heavily on handouts and placing of materials on library reserve. However, we did require a text for graduate students, Oyer and Oyer's Aging and Communication (1976). Since those students taking the course for graduate credit are of course expected to complete additional assignments, the plan was to have them abstract chapters from Oyer and Oyer and orally report on them to the class.

It might be difficult to decide whether this course should be described as an andragogical endeavor or a blend of pedagogy and geragogy, but at any rate, we instructors pledged to each other our commitment to lecture as little as possible and to involve students in every phase of the class. Our goal was to rely on class discussion activities to explicate basic theories and then to devote much of each session to individual and group application/demonstration of those theories.

Following introductions of the course, syllabus, instructors, and each other, the initial focus would be on defining terms, especially the term "communication" as it would be used in the course context. This probably would involve comparing student generated models of the process, which would then lead to discussion of the importance of communication to older Americans, culminating in brainstorming about the many specific settings where communication skills are, in fact, coping and survival skills.

Based on this groundwork, the next discussion setting would look at personal examples of communication breakdown, stressing at the same time that quantity of communication does not insure quality and that communication as we are defining it will not immediately solve all our social and personal problems.

The logical follow up to consideration of class members' communication related problems would be searching together for possible causes. As each cause was identified, exemplified and understood, individually or in dyads or small groups, we would work to minimize or eliminate those causal factors. For instance, as outdated or distorted self-concepts emerged as a cause of communication failures, we would work on self-analysis exercises so as to move toward more accurate, more current, more positive self-images. As we identified the common inability to anticipate and allow for the wide range of individual differences in our perceptual skills, we would employ exercises which would enhance our empathetic skills. When we agreed that many of us were ineffective listeners, we would work on listening skills. When we found we perceive ourselves as inept at responding on a dyadic or social level, we would strive to recognize and avoid disconfirming responses and work on active listening skills. When we were ready to admit that our encoding- decoding processes were based on one-word-one-meaning beliefs, we would look at approaches to semantic skills. When we admitted that we habitually tend to respond to others defensively, we would work on Gibb's (1961) defensiveness prevention behaviors. And, with realization that we may be insensitive to the broad range of non verbal communication behaviors, we would work toward more skillful encoding and decoding via the non verbal channels.

Once these most common obstacles to effective one-on-one interaction had been identified, analyzed and, hopefully, remedied, the class would turn to development of assertiveness skills. Role playing often is an effective method of clarifying and defining the behavioral alternatives we face when we perceive that our needs are not met: non-assertiveness of passivity, aggressiveness of both direct and indirect types, and assertiveness. Once assertiveness is understood as a positive way of standing up for your own rights and values

without having to attack someone else's, and once we understand the reasons we find assertiveness difficult but also realize its potential benefits, exercises will be so structured as to help us clarify our own individual values and practice standing up for them. The goal will be for students to come to understand that being assertive means you value yourself, your ideas are taken seriously, and you can work toward achieving harmony between personal values and personal behaviors. In terms of the course's broad objectives, students would as a consequence be facilitating becoming more active and engaged rather than disengaged. Interpersonal exchanges would be increasingly more rewarding and ability to achieve control, affection and inclusion would be enhanced.

The student then should be prepared to focus on dyadic conflict. After defining and sharing examples of interpersonal conflict, we would discuss the personal style options of handling conflict which are most rewarding. This should lead to exercises designed to encourage and build skills in the assertive, no-lose, win-win, "fight for growth" style of conflict management often attributed to Bach (1968) and Gordon (1970). Every effort would be made to provide each student an opportunity to practice no-lose problem solving of realistic conflicts, involving at least the following steps:

1. Personal identification and analysis of the problem in terms of your own unmet needs.
2. Description of those unmet needs to your partner in terms of nonjudgmental "I" language.
3. Soliciting in turn your partner's feelings and unmet needs regarding the situation, always employing active listening on the part of both to insure mutual understanding.
4. Considering together all possible solutions or means to the ends toward which you have agreed to work.

5. Selecting a solution which seems likely to leave neither interactant feeling he is a "loser."

6. Implementing the chosen solution and setting a definite checkup or followup session to evaluate progress.

The extent of explanation, amplification, and sequential practice needed will of course vary with student and situation.

Finally the class would focus on small group, rather than individual, problem solving. After consideration of the various small group discussion formats and of the possible relevance of the scientific method to structuring of group process, practical application would focus on group skills and on addressing of actual problems the students were facing in their environments. That is, the problems the groups would be analyzing and attempting to solve would be relevant to them -- at the home, neighborhood, institution, community, state, or even national level.

There seems little doubt that any communication course designed for older learners must teach the skills needed to handle interpersonal problems, but equally essential is a focus on society's problems and small group techniques for solving them. While the elderly have numerous interpersonal problems which are peculiar to their age group, often involving desires to retain control over their lives, activities, decision making, mobility, etc., they are equally interested in and well suited for discussion of and solution-seeking for society's many problems.

Schuetz (1980) discovered that the elderly consider a number of sociey's problems significant to them -- disintegration of family, rising cost of medical care, breakdown of religious values, media and street violence, crime and punishment, terrorism, problems of financing education, etc. She also observed (1980, p. 39) that the "older learners seemed better informed than undergrads --

the elderly are well read and follow news programming closely." Carmichael (1976, p. 15) reported a TV viewing survey which revealed that "with the single exception of the Lawrence Welk show, the elderly subjects preferred news and public affairs programs." Furthermore Bunting (1978, p. 4) reported the older learner has been found to "surpass young learners in verbal and integrating ability."

It therefore seems reasonable to suggest that interest in and knowledge of society's problems already exists and that as class participants, older learners would welcome the opportunity to discuss current issues and, in the process, move beyond simple "doom and gloom" problem pointing to development of skills in problem analysis and solving.

Such a unit should be subdivided into consideration of problem analysis, causal analysis and solution evaluation and advocacy. Problem analysis would first consider the values and benefits of problem solving, historically and to contemporary society. Attention then would focus on criteria for determining the existence of a problem and its appropriateness and susceptibility to small group consideration. Finally, we would look at approaches to measuring the seriousness and immediacy of the problem for particular audiences or groups or age segments of society.

Once problems are identified and analyzed in terms of existence, persistence and seriousness, and appropriateness to class and small group consideration, attention should shift to the advisability of attacking only the symptoms of a problem area, or searching out and attacking causes. It will be important that students understand that while causal attack normally is preferable, it is not always possible or practical. Some groups might benefit from study of methods of identifying and proving causation, possibly including Mill's canons of causation and various analytic techniques such as establishing

a chain of causes or narrowing from multiple causes to those causal factors which are most susceptible to treatment or elimination. (Walter and Scott, 1973, pp. 180-197) At any rate, some attention should be focussed on the concept of causation.

The course would then move to consideration of all solutions which could conceivably attack causes or relieve symptoms which have been identified by the group. Learners would be encouraged to establish what seemed reasonable, defensible criteria for acceptable solutions; then to evaluate all possible solutions produced by earlier brainstorming, in terms of these agreed upon criteria; then to select what appears to be the most practical, desirable solution; and then to discuss the steps necessary for implementation and testing of the choice. Because this implementation process often necessitates advocacy of the chosen solution in order to gain its general acceptance, practice could be provided in supporting a solution by methods of explanation, analogy, and use of authoritative testimony. This phase also lends itself very readily to use of various debating formats.

This type of unit obviously would need to be adapted to individual and group needs, interests, backgrounds and experience. In some settings, instructors might find it advisable to practice the basic techniques on a class or fairly large group basis and then, after some consideration of small group dynamics, proceed to practice sessions with groups of five to seven discussants.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this discussion has been to suggest to individual communication educators and/or gerontologists and/or their academic departments that a Communication and Aging course has the potential to enhance the understanding of care/provider trainees regarding the communication needs and potential of older persons as well as to enhance the communication proficiency

of the older student. If the course achieves these goals, everyone involved should experience enhanced life satisfaction, regardless of which theory of social adaptation to aging one accepts. The students should acquire the skills to facilitate being more engaged, rather than disengaged, more socially active, more socially rewarded than penalized, and better able to achieve inclusion, control and affection. Expressed in another way, students in such a course would be aided in achieving three of the goals recommended in the older Americans Acts, sometimes referred to as "aging's Magna Carta." Those goals are: "the best possible physical and mental health," "pursuit of meaningful activity within the widest range of civic, cultural and recreational opportunities," and "freedom, independence, and the free exercise of individual initiative in planning and managing one's life." (Older Americans, 1981, p. 33).

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